

## Revitalizing Women as Heads of Families in Aceh (Conflict and Post-Conflict Period)

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### Abstract

*The protracted conflict in Aceh made women feel more suffering, both physically and mentally. Women are the backbone of the family because their husbands are kidnapped, killed, wandering in search of a safe place. Women who are abandoned by their husbands are often faced with negative stigma. The term woman as the head of the family is an effort to change the view of widowed women to be positioned in the position of roles and responsibilities as the head of the family. Women can be independent with support from various parties towards independent and prosperous, just and dignified families. Post-conflict women as heads of families have a role in women's economic empowerment such as women's savings and loans, joining cooperatives of non-governmental organizations and contributing to village development and development.*

### Keywords

female heads of family; Aceh; conflict; post-conflict



### I. Introduction

The conflict period became the most difficult time for the people of Aceh and women were no exception. This unsafe condition caused many men to move out of Aceh, even abroad. The term woman as the head of the family is very urgently raised and becomes an interesting issue to be discussed. Prolonged conflict conditions make Acehese women live in poverty and receive unfair treatment as victims of violence from various parties. followed by the survivors of the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh, an estimated 250 people were missing and a large number of houses and other buildings disappeared without leaving a trace.

The number of women as heads of families who were affected by the conflict and tsunami, as expressed by Nani Zulminarni (Director of Pekka), responded to the widows of conflict victims in Aceh so that they could access resources, to overcome economic problems and traumas they experienced. Moreover, there are provocative and negative views that place widows in a disadvantageous position both in their work, and in their obligations as heads of families, when they do not have husbands. The mention of women as heads of families has become popular in society as an effort for social change and elevating the status of widows so that they are not viewed negatively in the eyes of the public.

The patriarchal culture inherent in the people of Aceh and Indonesia as well as other regions of the world, women are number two, and the breadwinners are men. The fame of women as heads of families is that they can complete their work and obligations as breadwinners, family supervisors, maintain family resilience and make choices in the family. The women referred to as the head of the family include a woman who is abandoned by her partner, a woman whose husband dies, an unmarried woman with family obligations, a woman who is married, but her partner cannot perform her capacity as part of the family, a

woman who has husbands but do not live with them consistently due to migration or polygamy.

This paper describes how the experiences of women heads of families in Aceh during the conflict period and the dynamics experienced by Acehnese women in general, and women as heads of families in particular, as an effort to enrich information on women's history writing in the local, national and international arenas.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Women as Head of the Family**

The family is a basic family unit consisting of a husband, wife and children.<sup>5</sup> Families in the Islamic view have a value that is not small. Even Islam pays great attention to family life by laying out wise rules to preserve family life from disharmony and destruction. Why is this so much the concern of Islam? Because it is undeniable that the family is the first brick to build a Muslim community palace and is a madrasa of faith that is expected to be able to produce generations of Muslims who are able to elevate Allah's sentence on earth. (Batubara, 2019)

Family life is bound by the existence of relationships between family members. Relationships in the family can be viewed from the dimensions of blood relations and social relations. The family in the dimension of blood relations is a unit that is bound by the relationship or blood relations between one another. While in the dimensions of social relations, the family is a unit that is bound by the existence of interconnected or interacting and influencing each other with each other even though among them do not have blood relations. (Djamarah in Hendra, Y. et al. 2019)

The head of the family is the individual who is responsible for a family (usually the father). The main head of the family is the man (husband). The husband is the head of the family who is responsible for all family members. If the husband is no longer there or dies, the obligations of the head of the family are replaced by the mother/wife. The husband is the head of the family who is responsible for all family members, not only taking care of things that are physical / real, but the head of the family regulates the vision and mission of the family to form a good family..

Islam does not discriminate between men and women, both in terms of position, nobility, honor, capacity, and freedom to work. One thing that cannot be denied is that women are a fundamental part of society. Biologically, women are different from men, but in terms of human rights and obligations the same. This means that the presence of women is not only a complement for men, but also equal partners in various aspects of life, both domestic and public.

Women who directly refer to one of the two sexes, in public activities are determined as the other sex which greatly determines the method of social representation that can be seen from the status and role of women. Subordination, discrimination or belittling of women which seems to show that women are the other sex whose presence is not noticed. The dichotomy of nature and culture has been used to show the separation and stratification between the two sexes which in the end makes women as objects..

Women in this modern era have played a critical capacity in the public arena. They are at this point not tied to space growing on their own. In fact, many of them play important roles, such as heads of state, associations and networks, and family foundations. However, women are still placed as a second being (the other sex). Women are still considered to have characters like men who are brave and strong.

The potential and individual qualities possessed by women are sometimes considered trivial by some people, so that potential is buried without any actualization. The effect of discrimination against women extends to the provision of education and employment levels. This fact makes the potential of women not empowered properly. In fact, if given the same opportunity, women will be better able to realize their abilities and in the end make women no longer considered a burden for development.

The role of women who participate in helping the family's economy is interesting. The role of women in general is only to complete domestic work, such as dealing with spouse and children, cooking, and doing other family tasks. However, on the other hand, women with the conditions mentioned above must be able to work without forgetting their inclinations as women. Therefore, women must grow a sense of awareness of their potential. This potential can be used as a type of business that can create family income to help the family economy, so that women do not have to work in the formal sector or look for work outside..

The individual potentials and qualities possessed by women are sometimes considered trivial so that the potential is buried without any actualization. The effect of discrimination against women extends to the level of women's work. The linkage of work to the regenerative area is the reason for the subordinate situation in the compensatory workforce. Gender differences in the realm of work also resonate in the family. Women often have to deal with cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, helping with passion, and so on. Thus, the low status and wages of women workers who are generally considered incompetent make them financially subservient to men's wages and build women's obligations in taking care of the family.

The reality and the view that women are only tasked with serving the household immediately changed due to the prolonged conflict in Aceh. The conflict has given birth to so much sorrow for society for the innocent. Loss of place to live, work, relatives, is a phenomenon that often occurs in Aceh. Even worse, many family heads are no longer able to earn a living properly to support their families. Threats and fear made most of the men migrate out of Aceh leaving their families behind. Others went out of their villages to the provincial capital with all their family members.

These women work because they have to work, the crush of poverty and powerlessness forces all family members to work, including women. The work they are involved in is packaged in various forms according to their low level of education and very limited abilities. Among them there are those who sell, become housemaids, and some even become beggars. The low level of education and knowledge makes these women vulnerable to violence and exploitation from irresponsible parties. To date, there is no specific data that provides an overview of the female workforce in Aceh during the conflict.

### **III. Result and Discussion**

#### **3.1. About Conflict and Strengthening the Role of Women**

Conflict is a kind of unrighteous feeling that disturbs the relationship between one part to another, one individual to another, one encounter to another.. Etymologically, conflict comes from the Latin *configere* which means hitting each other. Conflict is also characterized as an activity of one party that results in the disappointment, frustration, or disappointment of the other party where this can occur between local meetings or in relational relationships. This is in accordance with the assessment of Morton Deutsch, a pioneer in conflict resolution education who stated that in conflict, social interaction between individuals or groups is more influenced by differences than similarities. Meanwhile, according to Scannell, conflict is a



common and distinctive thing that arises because of differences in insight, goals, or qualities in a group of people.

Conflict in terminology means direct and conscious opposition between people or gatherings to achieve the same goal. In Simmel's functionalism point of view, conflict in society is generally identified with the cycle of binding together in public activity and in addition to something that is contrary to solidarity or combination. For Simmel, although conflict is an unavoidable scientific symptom of individual life, it does not need to be prolonged.

The conflict that occurred in Aceh was not only caused by the struggle for political power which was divided between religious and secular groups. However, the Acehese people's disappointment with the central government is also due to the Aceh government's lack of attention to the community which causes poverty. The central government did not respond to the disappointment of the Acehese people causing rebellions starting from DI/TII led by Daud Beureuh and GAM led by Hasan Tiro. On the other hand, Irwan Abdullah said that the people of Aceh are known as fighters and have a high sense of nationalism in fighting against Dutch colonialism, but the spirit of togetherness was eroded due to a conflict of about thirty years starting from the New Order and just ending the tsunami in 2004.

Along with the passage of time and various conflicts, such as the ongoing conflict in Aceh, have changed the socio-cultural conditions of women who inhabit the Veranda of Mecca. Currently, many women enter the workforce and work as manual labor or labor / family workers. An understanding that is rooted in society that men earn a living is another term called the head of the family, so some people reject the word that is pinned to women. As expressed by Ibu Nani, the term female head of household did not receive recognition in the community at first, but thanks to their involvement in village administrative activities the term became common in their village.

Images like The above also happened in one of the areas of Pidie during the conflict, at that time, Mrs. Nurjannah Ismail gave a lecture for mothers who was visited by a Teungku, an alumnus of an Islamic boarding school with a tougher character, even though there were no invitations for men. The activity was held in Meunasah beside the study hall, because information circulated that the event was facilitated by the Teungku Non-Governmental Organization to monitor the activities of the women. The study material at that time was about gender equality in Islam. Teungku emotionally said "women abeh teukeu'syak" meaning that women have different behavior. Simultaneously, Tengku said that women should not go anywhere if there is no muhrim, if ignoring them means violating religion.

Women who work and become heads of households have to take on multiple roles, being responsible for work and taking care of the household. This dual role of course has serious consequences for a woman. The weight of the responsibilities they carry makes their physical condition and health disturbed, as it is known, of course this must be a concern for many people. This was also experienced by one of the women selling cloth around to support the daily life and education of a child who was in college at the time, became constrained by selling cloth around because of frequent gun battles, finally stopped until now in an elderly condition.

During the conflict, the number of women in socio-economic vulnerability increased significantly. In Aceh Besar, there were 9,672 socio-economic vulnerable women in December 2002, and this number is expected to continue to increase if Aceh's problems are not resolved, in Pidie the number of socio-economic vulnerable women is 7,499 and in Banda Aceh City as many as 1,086 people. This fact is identical to the expression given by a family planning instructor in Indrapuri District named Muchtar. According to him, currently many women in the Indrapuri area are at the forefront of providing for their families. Husbands and

men for reasons of fear only spend time in coffee shops or at home, while wives and women work hard, working hard to provide a mouthful of rice for the family. They do not complain of fear and fatigue at work, all for the sake of the family they love. Moreover, when the season comes down to rice fields, the active role of women is seen to be more prominent than men, from plowing, planting, to harvesting. Women play a big role in determining the success of harvesting in the fields. In the past, the participation of men was still very visible, so far, under the pretext of unsafe conditions, women are forced to do unsafe tasks, women are forced to do tasks that should be the work of men. Women play a big role in determining the success of harvesting in the fields. In the past, the participation of men was still very visible. So far, under the pretext of unsafe conditions, women are forced to do unsafe tasks, women are forced to do tasks that should be the work of men. Women play a big role in determining the success of harvesting in the fields. In the past, the participation of men was still very visible. So far, under the pretext of unsafe conditions, women are forced to do unsafe tasks, women are forced to do tasks that should be the work of men.

The condition of women during the conflict period on the one hand was under pressure in layers, but on the other hand women appeared as the front line in improving family life. As expressed by Nurjanah Ismail who came face to face with the family in Juli Bireuen. One family has a child in the Indonesian National Army/TNI, one son is a member of Aceh Merdeka/GAM. One after another this family was visited by both parties. Finally his father became the target of both parties, this condition made this father sick, he could not do anything, did not dare to go to the garden or anything. This condition makes women appear as the backbone of the family to be able to support their three children who are studying in Banda Aceh by becoming motorcycle taxi drivers. At that time mostly only male motorcycle taxis, the presence of women motorcycle taxi drivers became an interest for teachers to go to school so that families were helped with the choice of work that must be occupied as female motorcycle taxi drivers to support family life. Furthermore, Nurjannah Ismail said that the conflict between women became the head of the family replacing the position of men who had fled to the forest. There is also a family, the fathers run away or migrate, then the wife and daughter are the backbone of the family.

Not much different from the victim's family above, in Meureudu who has a police son and a civil servant daughter. Her husband, a farmer and son as a trader, were targeted by an unknown person (OTK), and both became victims of murder. This condition requires them to be exodus to other districts. Until now, he only comes home occasionally on the day of Eid to get in touch with his family and make a pilgrimage to the grave of the deceased's father. His mother died about four years ago and was not taken to his place of origin. Another very sad reality because of the economic pressure that was experienced by a mother who was the head of a family whose two daughters were still in high school at that time, was urged by the OTK to leave her daughter's hometown, so that her house would not be visited by the Indonesian National Armed Forces. (TNI). While the economy is not very supportive. Finally, thanks to the support of his family in Banda Aceh, he was able to continue his studies in Aceh Besar, but God had other plans because of the tsunami in Banda Aceh, he had to return to his hometown and no longer be intimidated by the OTK and could continue his studies as usual at Madrasah Aliyah until he was finished.

### **3.2. The Reality of Women as Heads of Families: Between Strength and Hope**

Some of the reasons women are required to work are, first: women work because they decide to work. They are called choosing the main reason, generally because of poverty. People who choose the second reason are motivated by better social conditions and are upheld by higher education. So it can be understood that the background of women being

required to work in conflict situations describes the state of poverty. The increased participation of female working members is a reflection of the condition of female relatives living below the poverty line. A poverty-stricken family forces family relatives including women to look for any kind of work, the most important is having a job.

The image of women working hard to support the family's economy is very clear in rural areas. This is something that is possible, because the countryside is an area of very severe conflict. Coupled with limited work skills. In the end what happened was a comparison that was not in accordance with the nature of women. As expressed by Mrs. BS (50 years old) from Pidie, currently living in the crush of poverty, her village friends also experience the same condition. Their husbands are now no longer able to work optimally like before, they trade, trade and so on. Fear and feeling depressed make husbands spend time at home, or go abroad to other areas. A short initiative taken by BS's mother was to stay in the fields 20 KM away from home to cultivate crops, and in order to complete their work well, BS's mother had to stay in the fields for days, in the middle of the mountain without her husband being accompanied. This rather ironic picture of life had to be lived in order to be able to finance the needs of his family's life.

The same thing was experienced by NH's mother who has 4 children. When her husband was unable to work on their plantation in Central Aceh after a severe conflict also occurred there at the end of 2002, they returned to their hometown in Mutiara Timur District. They left all their belongings, houses, gardens and others there, what they brought were only makeshift equipment. In their original village they did not have any property, now they are living in other people's huts. NH's mother was forced to work anything to cover the family's needs, while her husband, with uncertain security conditions, stayed at home more than doing other activities. NH's mother in particular has no skills other than gardening, whereas in her native village, gardens are virtually non-existent.

The economic condition of the family, as described above, is not much different from the current condition. The story of one of the heads of the family met about three months ago. The author finds many facts that there are still women as heads of families as a result of the conflict, even though the conflict has passed almost 15 years ago. Information obtained from Halimah, a single parent woman whose husband was shot around 2000 and left six young boys and girls. Halimah immediately replaced her husband, became the head of the household, and worked hard to provide for her household life. Without complaining, Halimah worked while taking care of her children. By now all of his children were grown, and some were already married. There are only two more children who are still under the care and financed by Halimah. Currently, her adult child is independent and can occasionally provide assistance to Halimah. All wounds, traumas have gradually disappeared, Halimah feels happy with the success that has been achieved by her child. Although at a relatively young age, since her husband's departure until now, Halimah has no desire to remarry.

It is not only the struggle to become the head of the family that Acehnese women have to face after the conflict, but the severity of the trauma that continues to haunt them is also a big problem for post-conflict women. As revealed by the wife of the late Tgk Bantaqiah, after her husband died during the conflict, all recitation activities that used to be part of his wife's activities had to be closed, there were no longer people who recited the Koran and followed Suluk at his pesantren. This is all the impact of the conflict that led to the death of her husband, slowly over time, according to the wife of tgg Bantaqiah, the recitation of recitations in his place, especially for mothers, is still planned to be reopened for children. The remembrance activities carried out by mothers have never been stopped, even though they have been carried out since 2006 until now. Before the conflict there were thousands of students who came and recited the Koran in the pesantren, the conditions were pleasant, safe

and they learned Arabic and English as well as studied several books, unfortunately after the conflict the recitation was stopped so that the books that had been studied disappeared somewhere.

After the recitation closed and her husband died, Tgk Bantaqiah's wife continued her life as the head of the family and took care of her children. Interesting what was conveyed by Tgk bantaqiah's wife even though her husband was shot to death but they did not hold a grudge against anyone, even her husband before that willed him not to hold grudges and asked his wife to pray for bad people to be good, so they don't hold a grudge against anyone. Tgk bantaqiah's wife raises her children without asking for help from any party, even though the children are still small they do not give up and continue to rise to improve their lives for the better.

In addition to poverty, the conflict conditions in society in general and Acehese women in particular have experienced this trauma, as told by Aminah Usman. Aminah Usman as the son of a murdered father, this family comes from Pidie District, Aceh. On March 7, 1998, DOM (Military Operations Area) was taking place which claimed many victims, one of which was Aminah Usman's father who just disappeared. forced to live and raise their eight children. Aminah's family is very strong in living a life without a father due to a mother who is so strong.

#### IV. Conclusion

The conflict that occurred in Aceh Province indirectly experienced a change in the role of women from a wife or housewife to a worker who underwent multiple roles, on the one hand she remained a housewife who was struggling in the domestic sphere, on the other hand she also had to be in the public world to earn a living for his family. In a patriarchal culture this may not be common, because the task of making a living is in the hands of men. However, conditions in Aceh have changed this paradigm. The active role of women as the main pillars in meeting needs is a phenomenon that is often found in Aceh today. When her husband is gone or when men are afraid to go out of the house to earn a living,

However, what is unfortunate is that there is no optimal use of the female workforce. Many women do not work based on the skills they have but are only influenced by external factors that require them to work. As a result, there is an imbalance in the existence of women, especially in terms of work placements that are not in accordance with their inherent nature. Coupled with the very low level of education, which further worsens the portrait of women in the public sector. Many jobs or public roles that he does are not in accordance with the skills they have, but these jobs must be carried out to support the needs of themselves and their families.

The female workforce can be optimized at any time, especially in the conditions of Aceh that allow women to carry out public tasks and engage in politics. Although it must be admitted that with the dual roles played by women, it will create a new and greater burden on them, they must continue to take care of the household and at the same time earn income for their families, all of which must be endured patiently, because all of us believe that there will be a better tomorrow than that day.



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